

critical digest

Vol. II No. 7

November 28, 1949

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed Of The Current Broadway Critical Scene

N.Y. Openings This Week

Closing Door-Empire, 12/1/49. Cheryl Crawford production of Alexander Knox melodrama starring Knox and Doris Nolan drew three mild reviews and one 'con' review from Boston's daily critics. Doyle, Boston, American, panned the play, but the others thought the last act could be fixed to make it an acceptable Broadway play. All agreed that Knox had written himself a nice part, but not a very good play.

Clutterbuck-Biltmore, 12/3/49. Irving Jacobs presentation of the Benn Levy comedy features Arthur Margetson, Tom Helmore, Ruth Matteson and Ruth Ford. Opened Thursday in New Haven for three days; then to Boston for six days before Saturday's Broadway opening.

Quick Glance at N.Y. New Shows - digests on inside pages

That Lady-Beck, 11/22/49. Four critics praised both Katherine Cornell and the Kate O'Brien script, but the majority thought script was too heavy and dull for the star to overcome. Many critics thought that she was wasting her talents in this play.

Magazine Reviewers Look At The New Plays - digests on inside pages

The Father-Cort, 11/16/49. Newsweek and Morning Telegraph critics recommended the revival of the Strindberg classic starring Raymond Massey and Mady Christians. Rest of the magazine and trade critics suggested that the play should have remained a literary classic to read, not a play to see. Though most critics praised the acting, Margaret Marshall, Nation, thought that Massey was badly miscast in his role.

Lost In The Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Phelan, Commonweal and John Mason Brown, Saturday Review, claimed they were among the few dry-eyed individuals in the opening night audience of the Anderson musical version of Paton's Cry the Beloved Country. Phelan was particularly bitter in her attack on Anderson and his adaptation. Brown wrote that Duncan was miscast as the parson.

I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/2/49. George Jean Nathan admitted that he didn't like the Lunts, even when they were good. He didn't think much of Behrman's adaptation of the French script.

Critics Revisit Salesman

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Gene Lockhart's replacing of Lee Cobb as Willy Loman brought Gabriel, Cue, and Francis, Billboard, back to see the Arthur Miller drama. Critics thought Lockhart did a fine job, without copying any of Miller's characterization of the salesman.

Off Broadway Strindberg Revival Reviewed

Six of the top critics went to the Cherry Lane Theatre to review the On-Stage production of Strindberg's Creditors. All praised the show, the production and the acting. Most said the whole affair was better than the Strindberg play that was being produced on Broadway.

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance -- see page 856 - Cumulative Index Issued Monthly

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Lockhart Replaces Cobb In Salesman

Gene Lockhart has replaced Lee Cobb in the title role of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman, at the Morosco, and two of the critics reported on the Lockhart interpretation of the Willy Loman role. Gabriel, Cue, predicted that Lockhart after he worked into the part, would give a more human portrait of Willy, with just the right touch of humor. Francis, Billboard, thought the play lost some of its impact because Lockhart played in one key throughout, but he also thought Lockhart made Willy more of a human being. Critics agreed Lockhart had taken his own approach and not tried to copy Cobb.

That Lady

a. Times-Pro: Play is perfunctory, the performance is superb. Cornell is giving one of her finest performances and is making the theatre seem again like an honorable art. Sound, vigorous direction, well-supported by cast. Play seldom comes to life. Acting of this stature deserves a play of tumult, character-Atkinson.

b. Herald Tribune-Con: Attenuated bore. Cornell gives mannered and meaningless portrayal, she has not served self well in picking play. Play dressed to the nines, but it is woeful play, indifferently staged and acted.-Barnes.

c. News-Con: Play is pretentious and lead-footed bore to an infidel like myself who feels he must consider the play no matter how revered the star. Can recommend it to all Cornell's devoted followers across the country, but I think Cornell can be a rather monotonous actress.-Chapman.

d. Mirror-So-So: Play sketched out to dimensions of classic drama, but its content is shoddily melodramatic. So gifted is Cornell that she almost gives it the illusion of drama. Performance superior to its inspiration.-Coleman.

e. Compass-Con: Should have been play to hold playgoer spellbound, and sometimes near the end, it almost does. But history has got in the way of both dramatist and actors. It eats up so much talk. But Miss Cornell is beautiful. Plenty of woman, but not really enough play.-Pollock.

f. Post-Con: Distressing news is that Cornell is wasting her magic on long, dull commonplace romantic drama. Shows Cornell and other excellent players bogged down in morass of pompous tediousness.-Watts.

g. Sun-So-So: Vehement, cumbersome play, occasionally effective in the cloak and dagger tradition, offering a beautiful performance from Cornell. Valiant job of staging, production will serve star for some months, but not worth her time.-

Morchouse.

h. Journal American-Con: Play unconsciously put together with a grand opera ultimately in view, Puccini would dearly love it. Good cast and production headed by Cornell, play is sad for lack of singing. Some might call acting over-playing. Cornell is beautiful to behold, lovely to listen to, but her lines are frequently beyond her, portrayal never touched me.-Garland.

i. World Telegram-Pro: Cornell gives one of her warmest and wisest performances in extraordinary thin play. But Cornell not defeated by play, all the lure of the original idea remains in the production. Result is one of the most beautiful things to look at in many a day, glamorously lightly, firmly, intelligently directed and acted by an uncommon cast.-Hawkins.

Capsule Critiques by N.Y.Sun's Hi Phillips

The Father. Death with Mother

Producers Instruct Critics on "Music-Drama" Credits

The conductor, more than the stage director, deserves the staging credits in a "music drama" like Regina or Lost In The Stars, producers told Variety. The producers feel the critics don't realize the important role of the conductor in the over-all production, not just in the music end.

That Lady

a. Brooklyn Eagle-Pro: Not merely a costume play, it is an evening's moving experience. Theatre in its grand matter, not to be missed. Actors make the production. Cornell at her incomparable best.-Currie.

b. Newark News-Pro: Floquent and decorative costume drama, provides Cornell with role of distinctive substance. Brilliantly staged, good supporting cast.-Field.

c. Women's Wear-Con: Would have liked to enfold 'That Lady' into our warm-hearted critical embrace and shower our adulation upon her charm, her wit, her poise and her movement. But she is a frigid girl, remote and detached. Inert script doesn't let Cornell stir passion of audience, not always articulate.-Dash.

d. Morning Telegraph-Con: May have taken 15 years to reach theatre, but only took 15 minutes to begin falling apart. Handsomely mounted, awash in lovely period costumes, filled with eloquent speech, stumbles first off in opening scene and never quite regains its balance. Cornell does level best to pump passion into part, others held down by poor writing.-Bolton.

Times Letter Suggests Critics Sit In Balcony

"Would it not be better for critics to review the plays from the balcony or less expensive seats? In that way the critics would be giving a review for all people and not simply for those who can afford to pay the price of the better seats." This suggestion of Jesse Keshner, New York, offered in a letter to the Times Drama Mailbag feature.

The Father

e. Variety-So-So: Grim, trying play. Despite its present meritorious production, it remains a box office dud. Leading parts capably played. Massey makes exasperating title part plausible and sympathetic, Christians is superbly feline and lethal.-Hobe.

f. Billboard-Con: Handsome production, staged with grandeur. But it achieves the grandiose rather than the grand, its small excitements are stultified in tedium. Hard to believe portrait of leads. Plenty tabl shew prodigious bore.-Francis.

g. Women's Wear-Con: Play of venom and vitriol. But poisonous distillation seemed lacking in potency. Acting of stars disappointing.-Dash.

h. Morning Telegraph-Pro: Play holds taut, commands attention and is at moments piercingly touching. First night audience was restless, not as fascinated by play as I was. Leads are wonderful, but rest of cast not all treasure.-Bolton.

i. Wall Street Journal-Con: Play belongs in the museum category as it is presented. Compulsions of play and characters not made real. Scandinavian seethings of the evening failed to produce the "katharsis" which is the mark of true tragedy.-Cooke.

j. Journal of Commerce-Con: Adaptation not overcome long dreary conversational bouts. Christians comes up with standard performance, Massey performance of distinction. Supporting cast good.-Single.

Chicago Critic Pans Play Before Opening

Sydney Harris' severe panning of the Maxwell Anderson Anne of the Thousand Days three weeks before its Chicago opening in his Chicago News column has added a new twist to drama criticism. He called the play "one of the worst plays ever to come from the hands of a reasonably good playwright." The management of the local theatre protested to the publisher, but it is expected the column will not greatly affect the sale of tickets for the show.

The Father

a. Cue-Pro: Recommend play almost singularly as purge for those who've found the marriage hymn of I Know My Love a bit too honey-moony. Christians gives bigger and blunter performance. Massey must be bundle of wavers, quavers and nerves, no doubt, and so he is.-Gabriel.

b. Newsweek-Pro: Anyone more than usually interested in theatre should be grateful for this revival of the theatre classic. Massey gives excellent performance that loses something in what may be an attempt to tone down the author's stridency. Christians is completely successful. Number of good supporting performances.

c. Time-Con: Play wears a period air. Revival more in the nature of a coffin nail. Lacked skill, perception, tension. Christians now and then sizzled, Massey merely spouted.

d. Nation-So-So: Has some flaws, but of sufficiently high quality to show that though theme is powerful and still timely, writing is uneven and development of plot at times jerky. Massey miscast, voice too little body, too boyish, fails to achieve tension which part demands. Morris also miscast, performance is curiously amateurish. Christians performance is absolutely right.-Marshall.

e. New Yorker-Con: Unintentional comedy in play has been realized to some extent in revival. Christians is far more successful, though her heart somehow still belongs to "I Remember Mama". Massey plays role as a bewitching combination of Hamlet and Lear.-Gibbs.

Checking the Ads

"An exquisitely constructed play, excellently put together," is the quote credited to Hawkins, World Telegram, in The Father display ad. But this quote, accurate as far as it goes, doesn't say a word about how Hawkins liked this particular production of the Strindberg classic. Hawkins, commenting on the revival, wrote, "It is not a festive evening at the Cort, nor even a particularly gripping one. It is chiefly interesting because of the rarity with which a fine craftsman is presented."

Lost In The Stars

f. Commonweal-Con: Nothing articulately African or Christian about the piece at all. Would be correct to say that conclusion is strict Kipling, but more honest to call it strict Anderson. After all, Kipling was once alive. Mine were only dry eyes in house. Is a hit, for African information must add that Americans have the theatre they deserve.-Phelan.

g. Saturday Review-Con: Envy those who are as deeply moved by show as I was by the Paton book. Much to be admired in music, acting. Loss in cutting out important incidents, Duncan miscast as parson, staging too deliberate attempt at art.-Brown.

I Know My Love

a. George Jean Nathan-Con: Can't work up much enthusias for Lunts, even when they are fairly good, which is not often. Behrman's adaptation of French play is little worse than the average. They are good, likeable, intelligent actors. Maybe my interest in such plays will increase when and if some playwright presents us, for a change, with an eminent man who can take care of himself and whose wife originally sweet, comprehending and tolerant, gradually with her conviction of own consummate sapience turns out to be a nuisance.

Post Critic Asks Nathan to Give Credits

"I think it would be graceful of George Jean Nathan, who likes to quote from Vernon Rice's theatrical interviews, if he would name his source the next time," chided Watts, Post. Rice is drama editor of the N.Y. Post.

Six Critics Visit Off Broadway Strindberg Revival

On Stage production of Strindberg's Creditors at the Cherry Lane Theatre was praised by the very critics who panned the Broadway production of Strindberg's The Father. Atkinson, Times, termed the production "good stuff, the actors are not afraid to pitch in and act." Hawkins, World Telegram, liked the Off Broadway show better than the Broadway play because it avoided any dated flavor. Garland, Journal American, suggested the Broadway cast of The Father see the On Stage production to see how Strindberg can be acted, a sort of Strindberg without tears. The critic from Variety thought the cast appeared too young for their parts, but otherwise did fine acting jobs. Dash, Women's Wear, considered the play as a literary item more than a piece for the theatre. But he also praised the acting and the production. Pollock, Compass joined these in thinking the actors of the downtown group outshined the uptown cast.

How the Critics Work

Ashton Stevens, Chicago Herald American, who has returned to his post after a recent illness, has perfected a method of writing his reviews in comfort and still meeting his deadline. Instead of rushing to the office after the play, he goes to his home. There he props himself up in bed, dictates his review to his secretary, and the paper sends a radio flash car for his copy.

Key to N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance

Reviewers are rated as to how they liked the show, not if they think it will be a hit. "Pro" means the reviewers recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. "Con" means he doesn't recommend it as such. "So-So" means the reviewer didn't state his preference directly.

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|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 11. Newark News | 21. Catholic World |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Women's Wear Daily | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Daily Worker | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. Wall St. Journal | 24. Ch. Sci. Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass (Star, PM) | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat. Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. George J. Nathan | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Sun | 17. Morning Telegraph | 27. Time |
| 8. NY Journal American | 18. Variety | 28. Nation |
| 9. NY World Telegram | 19. Billboard | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Theatre Arts | 30. New Yorker |

A Streetcar Named Desire-Barrymore, 12/3/47. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-22-23-26-28-29-30. Con: 13-21-24. So-So: 16-27.

As The Girls Go-Broadway, 11/14/48. Pro: 1-4-6-7-8-10-11-12-14-15-16-18-19-23-26-27-29-30. Con: 2-5-17-22. So-So: 3-9-20-21.

Born Yesterday-Miller, 2/4/46. All 30 critics voted "Pro".

Browning Version-Coronet, 10/12/49. Pro: 1-2-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-17-18-19-25-26-28. Con: 3-16-23-27-29-30. So-So: 24.

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: Nation. So-So: Time

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-19-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-22-23-26-27-30.

Diamond Lil-Plymouth, 2/5/49. 30 reviews for Mac. 30 against her play.

Goodbye My Fancy-Golden, 11/17/48. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-10-11-12-15-17-18-19-20-22-26-30. Con: 9-13-14-21-28-29. So-So: 16-23-25-27.

I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/1/49. Pro: 2-3-4-6-7-8-19-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Con: 1-5-22-27-30.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: New Republic. No review in Nation.

Land An Ear-Mansfield, 12/16/48. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-19-10-11-12-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-26-27-30. Con: 5-13-29. So-So: 14-28.

Lost In The Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Con: 8-9-13-24-28-29-30. So-So: 4-27.

Miss Liberty-Imperial, 7/15/49. Pro: 4-7-8-12-18-19. Con: 1-2-18-20-22-23-27-29. So-So: 3-6-9-21-26.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-18-19-20-22-23-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Montserrat-Fulton, 10/29/49. Pro: 3-5-6-8-9-11-12-13-22-27. Con: 1-4-7-10-14-16-18-19-23-24-25-26-28-30. So-So: 2-15-17.

Regina-46th Street Theatre, 10/31/49. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-9-11-12-14-17-18-24-26-27-30. Con: 2-3-10-15-16-19-25-28. So-So: 1-23.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-15-17-18-19-20-24-25-26-30. So-So: 24-27.

The Madwoman of Chaillot-Royale, 12/28/48. Pro: 1-2-3-5-11-12-13-14-18-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 4-6-7-8-15-16-19-28. So-So: 9-10.

Touch and Go-Broadhurst, 10/13/49. Pro: 1-3-6-9-11-12-13-15-16-17-23-24-26-27-28-30. Con: 2-4-5-7-14-18-19-22. So-So: 8-10.

Where's Charley?-St. James, 10/11/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-8-9-11-14-15-17-18-20-21-23-29-30. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27.

Yes, M'Lord-Booth, 10/4/49. Pro: 2-3-5-6-7-9-11-14-15-17-19-22-26-30. Con: 1-4-8-13-23-26. So-So: 10-12-16.

The Father-Cort, 11/16/49. Pro: 3-10-11-17-23-26. Con: 2-4-5-7-8-9-12-14-15-19-27-30. So-So: 1-18-28.

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Cumulative Index for 1949-1950 Season

December 1949

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed Of The Current Broadway Critical Scene

Key to Monthly Cumulative Index

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Number before the dash signifies the publication, which is given the same number as in NYC Criticism At A Glance. Number following the dash is the page number, the letter is the paragraph on the particular page.

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| 1. NY Times | 11. Newark News | 21. Catholic World |
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Browning Version-Coronet, 10/12/49. Pro: 1-890A,2-890B,4-890D,5-890E,6-890F,7-890G,8-890I,9-890H,10-890J,11-890K,12-890L,13-886A,14-886B,15-886C,17-890M,18-886E,19-886F,25-865J,26-886H. Con: 3-890C,16-886D,23-886K,27-886J,29-865I,30-886I. So-So: 24-886G.

I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/1/49. Pro: 2-864B,3-864C,4-864D,6-864F,7-864G,8-864H,9-864I,10-864J,11-864K,12-864L,14-865G,15-865H,17-865A,18-865B,19-865C,23-865E,24-859C,26-865D,28-859A. Con: 1-864A,5-864E,16-855A,22-860E,27-865E,29-859B,30-859D.

Lost In The Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-875B,2-875C,3-875D,5-874K,6-875F,7-875G,10-875J,11-874C,12-874D,14-874I,15-874J,17-874B,18-873L,19-874A,23-865F,26-874E. Con: 8-875H,9-875I,13-868G,22-854F,24-868F,25-854G,28-868H,27-861A,30-868I. So-So: 4-875E,27-874F.

Montserrat-Fulton, 10/29/49. Pro: 3-872C,5-877E,6-872E,8-872I,9-872J,11-872L,12-873D,13-867D,22-859H,27-873H. Con: 1-872A,4-872D,7-872G,10-872K,14-873J,16-867A,18-873A,19-873B,23-873I,24-867B,25-859B,26-873G,28-867C,30-873F. So-So: 2-872B,15-873K,17-873C.

Rogina-46th St.Theatre, 10/31/49. Pro: 4-876D,5-876E,6-876F,7-876G,8-876H,9-876I,11-876K,12-876L,14-867E,17-867G,18-867H,24-867I,26-868A,27-868B,30-868D. Con: 2-876B,3-876C,10-876J,15-867F,16-859F,19-867I,25-859E,28-868C. So-So: 1-876A,23-868E.

The Father-Cort, 11/16/49. Pro: 3-858C,10-858J,11-858K,17-853H,23-845A,26-854B. Con: 2-858B,4-858D,5-858E,7-858G,8-858I,9-858H,12-853B,14-853I,15-853J,19-853F,27-854C,30-854E. So-So: 1-858A,6-858F,18-853E,28-854D.

That Lady-Beck, 11/22/49. Pro: 1-852A,9-852I,10-853A,11-853B. Con: 2-852B,3-852C,5-852E,6-852F,8-852H,12-853C,17-853D. So-So: 4-852D,7-852G.

-Cumulative Index 1949-1950-
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Current Shows

Touch And Go-Broadhurst, 10/13/49. Pro: 1-891A,3-891C,6-891F,9-891I,11-891K,12-891L,13-880C,15-887D,16-880E,17-887E,23-887K,24-880D,26-887H,27-887I,30-887J.
Con: 2-891B,4-891D,5-891E,7-891G,14-887C,18-887F,22-865K. So-So: 8-891L,10-891J,29-875A.

Yes, M'Lord-Booth, 10/4/49. Pro: 2-896G,3-896H,5-896J,6-897A,7-897B,9-897D,11-897F,14-897G,15-897J,17-897I,19-893D,22-880B,26-893-G,29-887A,30-893I. Con: 1-896F,4-896L,8-897C,13-893B,23-893E,27-893H. So-So: 10-897E,16-880A,12-897H,18-893C

Continuing Shows from Past Seasons - see NYC Criticism At A Glance for Ratings.

A Street Car Named Desire-Barrymore, 12/3/47
As The Girls Go-Broadway, 11/14/48
Born Yesterday-Miller, 2/4/46
Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49
Death Of A Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49
Diamond Lil-Plymouth, 2/5/49
Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/48
Lord An Ear-Mansfield, 12/16/48
Miss Liberty-Imperial, 7/15/49
Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48
South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49
The Madwomen of Chaillot-Royale, 12/28/48
Where's Charley?-St. James, 10/11/48

New Shows That Closed

Love Me Long-48th St. Theatre, 11/7/49-11/19/49. Con: 1-866A,2-866B,3-866C,4-866D,5-866E,6-866F,7-866G,8-866H,9-866I,10-886J,11-886K,12-866L,15-860A,18-886H,19-860C,30-860D. So-So: 17-886M,14-860B.

Twelfth Night-Empire, 10/3/49-11/12/49. Pro: 1-895A,11-895K,15-896C,17-896D,18-896E,22-880G,24-892E,25-880F,26-892F. Con: 2-895B,3-895C,4-895D,5-895E,8-895H,9-895I,16-892B,19-892C,23-892D,27-892G,29-887C,30-892H. So-So: 6-895F,7-895G,12-896A,13-892A,14-896B,19-892C.

Shows of Past Seasons That Closed

Anno of the Thousand Days - 12/8/48 - 10/10/49

